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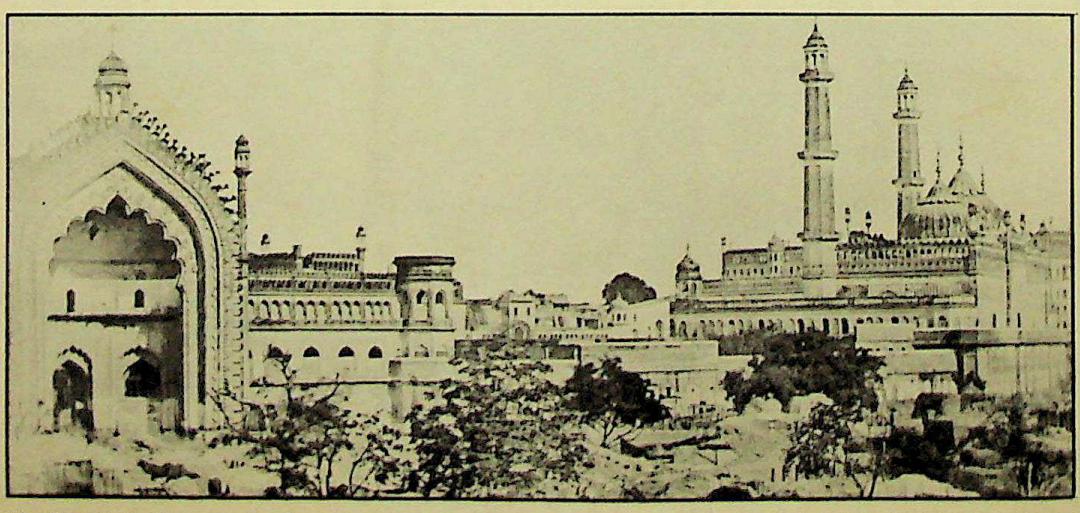
MUSLIM

Muslims, or Mohammedans, believe in one god, the last and greatest of whose prophets, including those of the Jewish Church and Jesus of Nazareth, was Mohammed, the sixth-century writer of the Koran. This holy book is the Word of God Himself, revealed through His prophet, and emphasizes the unity of God as opposed to the Christian Trinity. The Mohammedan has five religious duties: to know the Islamic Creed—Mohammedans call their religion *Islam*, meaning 'submission to the will of God (Allah)'; to worship at five appointed times during the day; to fast between dawn and sunset during the month of Ramadan; to give alms; to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. The five times of prayer are at dawn, or just before sunrise; noon; just before sunset; just after sunset; and at the end of the evening. In a mosque (*mosjid,* meaning 'place of prostration') a semi-circular niche, reserved for the *imam* who leads the prayer, indicates the direction of Mecca, towards which the Muslim kneels to pray, and at the appointed times a *muezzin* calls to the faithful from the minarets of the mosque. A Muslim away from a mosque must judge the times and direction of Mecca for himself and must prostrate himself to pray wherever he is. Muslims do not smoke tobacco or drink alcohol, and they have dietary laws which forbid the eating of certain things, such as pig meat. Muslim women are excluded from both religious and social life, living in total seclusion, or *purdah.* Outside their homes they wear a *burqua* which covers them from head to foot, leaving only two small holes for the eyes.



The Imambara Mosque at Lucknow

Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

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The sepoy army of Bengal would have seemed a very strange one to any Western officer used to commanding European military forces. The English officer of the sepoy troops probably did not begin to understand the complexities of his soldier's spiritual problems, nor wish to, but in most cases, as far as he was able, he would take care not to offend the caste rules and religious customs of his men. An officer might take it for granted that a sepoy would go to his death at his command, or rescue him under fire at the risk of losing his own life; yet to his men the Englishman was disgusting—to the Muslim because he smoked and drank alcohol, and to the Hindu because he ate meat. If the shadow of that same officer were to fall across the food of a sepoy that food would, in the sepoy's eyes, have been contaminated, and he would sooner throw it away and starve than eat it. It would not seem odd to an Englishman that the Hindu must wash carefully each day—except that the ritual was for spiritual cleansing, not merely personal hygiene, and the water might be dirty and carry disease. Some battalions were entirely vegetarian—yet they were mercenary soldiers, paid to kill. Many Hindus would only eat food cooked by someone of their own or a higher caste, so, even on the march, it was necessary to halt and allow the sepoys to take off the more cumbersome articles of their uniform, for each man to light his own fire and cook and eat his ration. After they had eaten they all had to pack and dress again before they could move on.

Ritual washing in the Ganges at Benares

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CASTE

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Caste is both the religious and the social level in the life of Hindus. Socially a caste is a group whose members follow a traditional occupation, profession or trade. The word caste comes from the Hindi word for colour, and the colour of the skin is one of the chief means by which one Hindu can tell the caste of another. As caste rules forbid marriage between castes, the members of each caste have developed the characteristics of their position to such a degree that they are virtually separate races. It is very difficult for a foreigner to distinguish between castes, but to the Hindu physical features, and such things as dress, names, accent and tone of voice, manners, even the way of greeting, are easily identifiable.

There are four main castes: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra, which themselves contain countless divisions and sects, each with their own rites and rituals. The marks which some Hindus wear on their faces are *sect* marks, *not* 'caste marks' as they are usually called by Europeans.

The highest caste is the Brahman, priests and scholars whose duty is to teach the sacred writings and to perform religious rites; the palest-skinned, with refined features and exquisite manners, a Brahman would fit the idea of an aristocrat in any country.

The Kshatriya are soldiers who defend the realm of their king—who would also be a Kshatriya; darker-skinned, a Kshatriya would be warrior-like in nature and sturdily built.

The Vaishya are merchants and traders; a typical Vaishya is plump and self-satisfied—if he is successful!

The Sudra are servants to the three higher castes, labourers and unskilled workers; the darkest-skinned, they are of two distinct types: the first are personal and household servants to the superior castes, or those whose trade or occupation is spiritually (and in many cases this is the equivalent of physically) clean. The second and lowest are the 'Untouchables' who perform the most menial tasks, and those that are often likely to contaminate others physically—as well as spiritually—such as refuse-collection, sewage-disposal, road-sweeping, and such trades as leather-working. All members of any higher caste would take care not to come in contact with them and under no circumstances would accept anything they had touched, such as food or water.

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The first three castes, although unequal in privilege and social standing, have some common religious rites, but the Sudra is totally excluded from the religious life and knowledge of his superiors—although if he dies having properly fulfilled the duties of his caste he will be reborn into a higher caste and so become eligible to take part in religious life.

The Ganges, the sacred river of the Hindu, is the one place where all castes are equal—even the Sudra, though he will usually bathe away from the higher castes out of courtesy. The water of the Ganges is considered holy and Hindus believe it will wash away their sins.

The cows which roam the streets of many Indian cities are not 'sacred' as is frequently supposed. They come from the often barren countryside to scavenge for food, and as Hindus are vegetarians the refuse is largely vegetable matter. Because of his belief in reincarnation the Hindu will not kill, and the cows are simply allowed to roam the city, like stray cats in London—though rather more spectacular! The term 'sacred cow' has probably arisen out of confusion with the fact that the bull is the sacred animal of a sect which worships Siva (below), but it is only to these worshippers that bulls are *sacred*, and they are very different animals from those in the streets, being carefully looked after and revered by the followers of the sect. They would certainly not be allowed to scavenge the streets.

Women in *burquas* *Radio Times Hulton Picture Library*

Saddhu with a sacred bull *Mansell Collection*

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HINDU

Hindus believe in many gods and goddesses, of whom the most important are Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer. Hindus worship and sacrifice to the gods to get their help in obtaining release from reincarnation. They believe that when a man dies he is reborn, depending on the way in which he has lived his previous life, into a higher or lower caste, or into some form of animal life, which is why the Hindu will not kill or eat meat; one sect always sweep the way ahead of them for fear that as they walk they might crush an insect. He aims, by good conduct and strict obedience to his religious laws, to progress by reincarnation through stages of purification and religious understanding, until finally he is released from the round of rebirth, and his spirit, losing its individual identity, becomes part of the Universal Soul. Hinduism is the oldest surviving religion in the world and men and women have equal religious rights and standing, there being priestesses as well as priests.

Composite carving of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva

Mansell Collection

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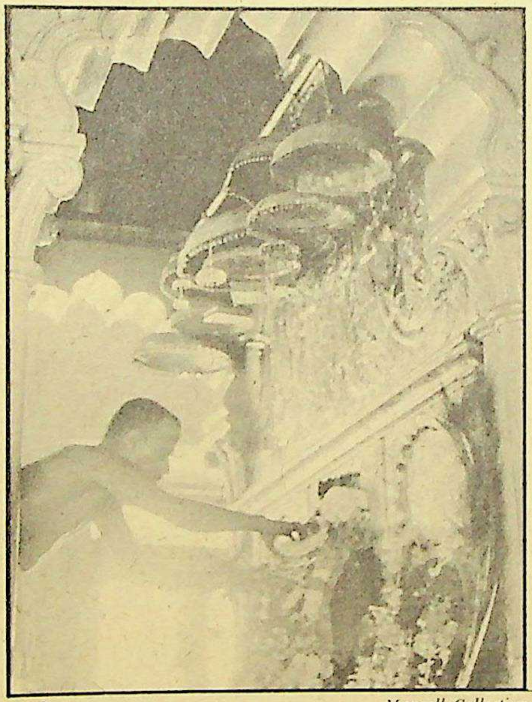
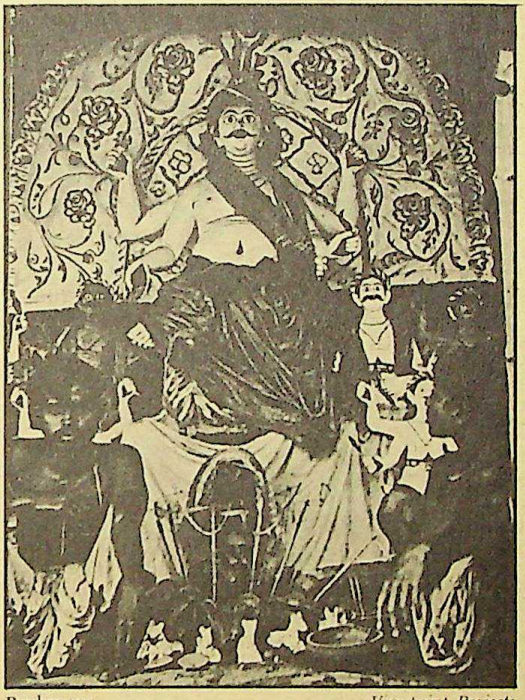
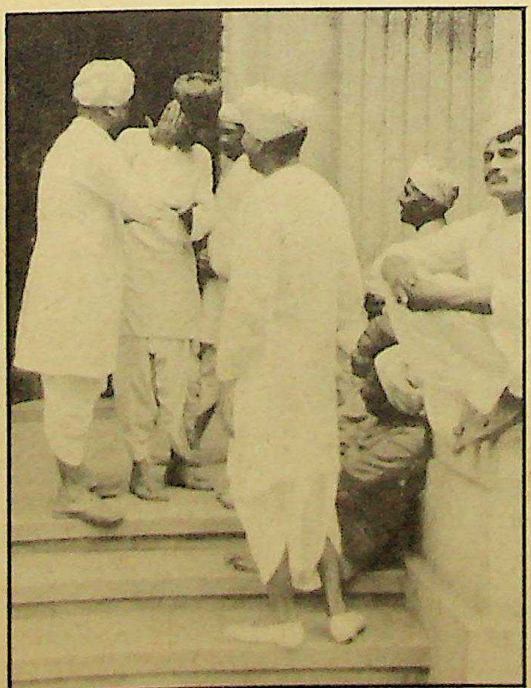
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS



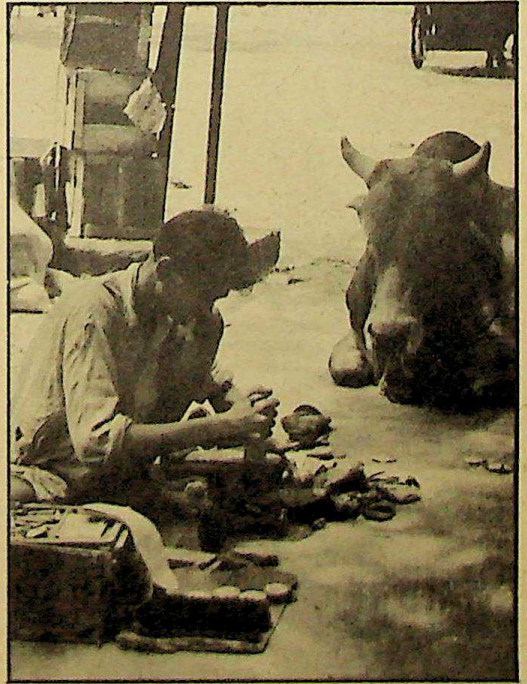
Brahman *Mansell Collection*



Brahmans *Viewpoint Projects*



Vaishya *Mansell Collection*



Sudra *Keystone*